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Dear Bob:

Thank you for your thoughtful letter; it was a pleasure to meet you in Santa Monica, and I enjoyed our discussion. I am sorry that we didn't get more chance to talk at IDA, but my recent stay in Washington was rather hectic.

Like you, I found the MDRS meeting disappointingly arid, but it did set me thinking again about problems of command and control. If you heard my remarks at the first session, you may remember that I emphasized the importance of learning from crises: i.e., observing and analyzing the operations of the government during crises which did, after all, come along at least as frequently as exercises, in the same detail and to the same end that we examine exercise results. The week after this exhortation I had the opportunity to do some observing on my own during the Cuban affair.

When the height of the crisis had passed, I spent a good deal of time trying to persuade some of the participants of the value of a detailed case study, examining the performance of the communications system, the crisis organization, and the patterns of information and uncertainty at successive stages. So far, the response has been quite cool. Everyone knows the existence of one or two skeletons and suspects the presence of others, and no one is anxious to see any of them exposed. With this sort of sensitivity to the political risks of finding out what really happened, the government seems doomed to learn precisely the same lessons from each successive crisis: that is, to learn nothing at all from them.

I am sure we shall meet again before long; I am looking forward to it.

Sincerely yours,

Daniel Ellsberg  
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